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Fisheries of The Cameroons, 1973

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Office of International Fisheries
WASHINGTON, D.C.
October 1974

noaa NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION / National Marine Fisheries Service

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ABSTRACT

The United Republic of Cameroon's artisanal fisheries produce about 75 percent of the country's total fish, averaging 30,000 to 50,000 metric tons (t) of freshwater species and about 15,000 t of saltwater species each year. The nation's industrial fisheries catch has reached about 23,000 t, but extensions of fisheries zones by Cameroon's neighbors have restricted the growth of this fishery. To offset this situation the Government of Cameroon plans to develop a high-seas fishery. The Government also hopes to increase freshwater production by developing aquaculture programs.

BACKGROUND

The United Republic of Cameroon is a medium-sized West African country on the Gulf of Guinea just north of the Equator. The Cameroon's largest neighbor is Nigeria, which stretches from the Atlantic Ocean north towards Lake Chad where most of Cameroon's freshwater fish are caught. The Cameroon is bounded on the northeast by Chad and on the east by the Central African Republic. Cameroon's southern neighbors include the Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon, and Rio Muni (Equatorial Guinea). The island of Fernando Po (also a part of Equatorial Guinea) is off the western coast of the Cameroons.

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The coastline of the Cameroons is 346 km long. The width of the Continental Shelf averages about 40 km in the northern half of the country and gradually narrows to about 25 km near the southern border. The total shelf area (to 200 m) is about 12,920 km^2. In the northern sector, the shelf has heavy concentrations of mud which is especially suitable for the growth of shrimp. Sand and sandy-mud bottoms are common towards the southern part of the shelf. Figure 1 shows the bottom conditions of the Cameroonian Continental Shelf.

The most important marine fish species found in these waters are: barracudas, croakers, drums, rays, sardines and sardinelike fish, breams, soles, and threadfins. Crabs, lobsters, and shrimp are also caught in these waters.

One of the most important marine creatures found in these waters is shrimp. The Cameroons has, in fact, long been known for its shrimp resources. Early Portuguese explorers named the Cameroons after the Portuguese word for shrimp ("camarao"), which was found in abundance. Penaeus duorarum and P. atlantica are the principal species of shrimp in these waters. The best fishing for shrimp is at depths of 20 to 50 m from April to October (average monthly catch per vessel is 11 t). Despite the known existence of shrimp in these waters, fishing for this marine delicacy did not begin until 1968. An estimated 2,320 t of shrimp was harvested in 1973.

ARTISANAL FISHERIES

The Cameroon's artisanal fisheries contribute about 75 percent of the country's total fish. This supply represents about 60 percent of the animal protein needs of the country's 6 million inhabitants, whose average annual consumption of fish is about 13 kg per individual. These artisanal fisheries use primitive gear and techniques, operate on a very small scale, and are usually isolated from major consumer areas.

Inland:

Statistics on Cameroon's inland fisheries catch are not available. The FAO estimates that freshwater production is 30,000 t to 50,000 t per year. Most of the freshwater catch is made in Lake Chad and the Legone and Chari Rivers, which flow out of this lake. The remainder comes from the Benoue River and from the rivers and lakes in the southern forest region. Local officials estimate that the fishery has 6,000 canoes, of which about 1,000 have outboard motors. Gill nets, longlines, and traps are commonly used in this fishery.

With United Nations Development Program (UNDP) assistance, an effort has been underway for several years to develop fish pond production. Modern fish culture techniques and equipment are being introduced into rural areas in hopes that these will increase fish production to about 70 kg per hectare per year. The Government maintains two large fish culture stations at Foumban and Bamenda and smaller stations throughout the country.

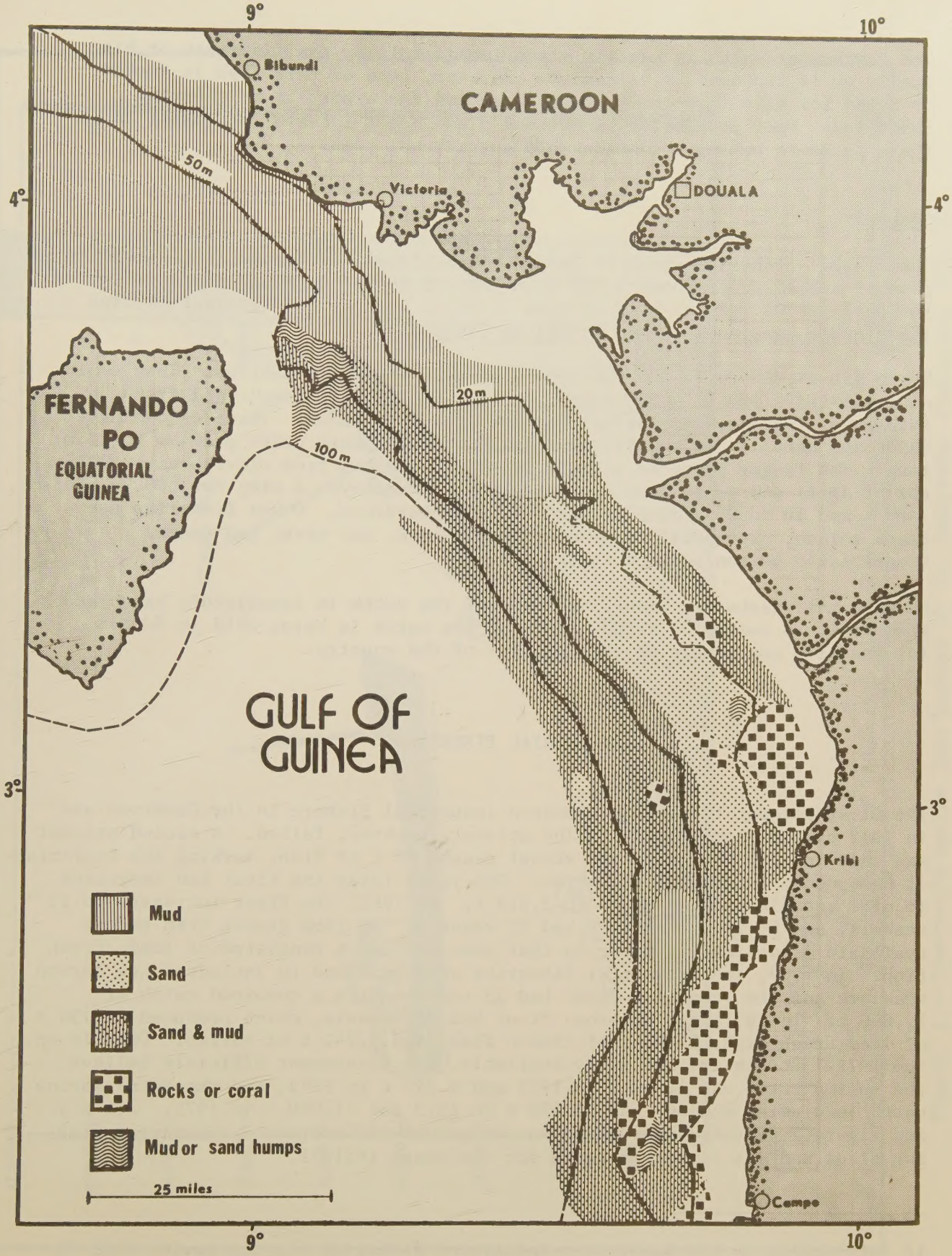


Figure 1.--Bottom conditions of the Continental Shelf area and shrimp fishing grounds off the Cameroons.

The freshwater catch is usually eaten immediately by the fisherman or his family or is consumed by villagers. However, some of this fish is smoked or dried for sale throughout the country and for export to neighboring countries. Poor processing techniques plus insect infestation result in these products having a considerable nutritional loss.

Coastal:

The coastal fisheries catch by Cameroon's artisanal fishermen is believed to have increased from around 5,000 t in the mid-1960s to around 15,000 t in the early-1970s. About half of this catch is sardine and sardinelike fish (Sardinella cameronensis and Ethmalosa fimbriata).

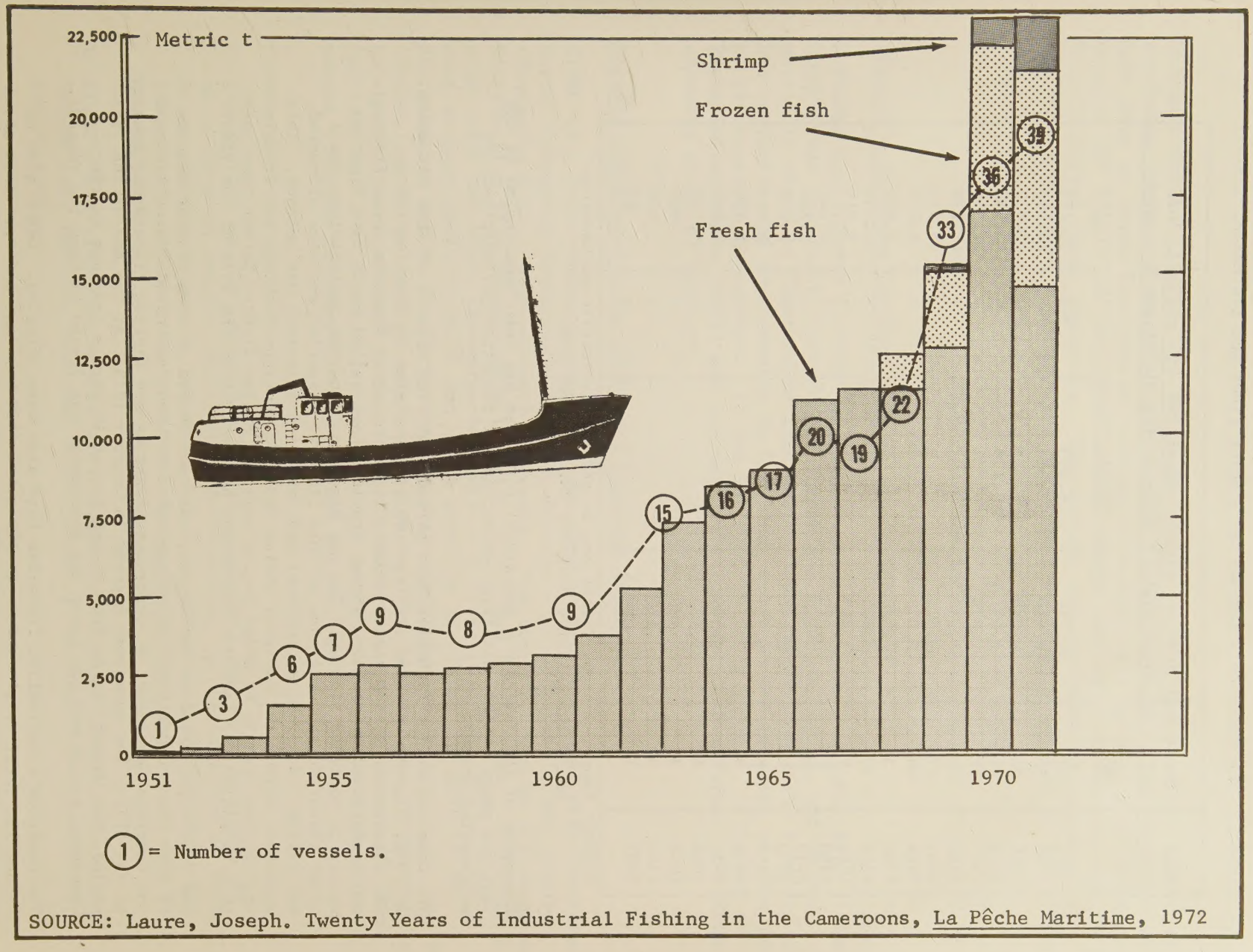
There are 11,000 to 12,000 fishermen in these coastal fisheries. They employ an estimated 1,500 to 3,000 dugout canoes--called "pirogues"--and fish the estuaries, lagoons, and coastal beaches along the shore. These canoes have sails and oars; a few now have outboard motors. These craft are 4 m to 12 m long. The larger pirogues usually fish for sardines from mid-February to the end of April and again from September to mid-January. A ring net 500 to 600 m long and 10 to 20 m deep is used to catch sardines. Other fisheries use beach seines, cast nets, drag nets, drift lines, set nets, and traps. Occasionally poison is used to catch fish.

As with the freshwater fisheries, most of the catch is immediately eaten and some of it is smoked or dried. Some of the catch is being sold in Douala for freezing and resale in the interior of the country.

INDUSTRIAL FISHERIES

The first attempt to develop a modern industrial fishery in the Cameroon was in 1912 by German colonizers. The attempt, however, failed. A second attempt was made in 1951 when a single vessel caught 60 t of fish, marking the beginning of Cameroon's industrial fisheries. Ten years later the fleet had increased to nine vessels and the catch to 3,819 t. In 1962, the fleet increased to 15 vessels, and by 1968 the fleet had 22 vessels. In 1968 frozen fish became available domestically; prior to that year the catch consisted of iced, fresh fish. In 1969, the industrial fisheries were expanded to include 8 new shrimp trawlers and the resulting fleet had 33 vessels with a combined catch of 12,690 t. In 1971, the Cameroon fleet had 39 vessels, which produced 14,734 t of iced-fresh fish, 6,695 t of frozen fish, and 1,742 t of shrimp. Details on the 1972-73 catch are not fully available, but Government officials believe the shrimp catch was 1,740 t in 1972 and 2,320 t in 1973, and the total marine catch (excluding shrimp) was 21,500 t in 1972 and 21,000 t in 1973. Table 1 and figure 2 provide information on the growth of Cameroon's industrial fishing fleet and its fisheries catch for the years 1951-71.

1/ Information on the Cameroon's industrial fisheries for the period 1951-71 was obtained from: Laure, Joseph, "Vingt ans de pêche industrielle au Cameroun," La Pêche Maritime, November 20, 1972, pp. 864-867.



SOURCE: Laure, Joseph. Twenty Years of Industrial Fishing in the Cameroons, La Pêche Maritime, 1972

Figure 2.--Cameroon's marine fish harvest by the industrial fisheries, 1951-71

Table 1.--The Cameroon's industrial fishing fleet and its catch, 1951-71

Year	Fleet	Catch			Total catch
		Fresh fish	Frozen fish	Shrimp	
	No.	Metric t			
1971	39	14,734	6,695	1,742	23,171
1970	36	16,910	5,312	943	23,165
1969	33	12,828	2,538	257	15,623
1968	22	11,511	1,179	-	12,690
1967	19	11,558	-	-	11,558
1966	20	11,239	-	-	11,239
1965	17	8,515	-	-	8,515
1964	16	8,077	-	-	8,077
1963	15	7,436	-	-	7,436
1962	15	5,335	-	-	5,335
1961	9	3,819	-	-	3,819
1960	9	3,220	-	-	3,220
1959	8	2,860	-	-	2,860
1958	8	2,610	-	-	2,610
1957	8	2,553	-	-	2,553
1956	9	2,750	-	-	2,750
1955	7	2,500	-	-	2,500
1954	6	1,500	-	-	1,500
1953	3	480	-	-	480
1952	3	120	-	-	120
1951	1	60	-	-	60

SOURCE: Lauro, Joseph. "Vingt ans de pêche industrielle au Cameroun," La Pêche Maritime, November 20, 1972, pp 866.

Expansion of the Cameroon's industrial fisheries has been handicapped in the last few years by the unilateral extentions of fisheries jurisdictions by neighboring states.

The Cameroon shrimp fisheries have already felt the effects of this situation. In 1972, Nigeria extended its territorial sea claims to 30 miles (48 km.). The Cameroonian shrimp season usually lasts for about 4 months (peak fishing), and traditionally Cameroon shrimp trawlers have sailed north into Nigerian waters to continue fishing. The new Nigerian fisheries jurisdiction was a clear threat to the existence of this fishery. Negotiations were attempted, but failed. However, an informal and unwritten agreement was reached. This agreement allows the Cameroon shrimp fleet to continue fishing, but stipulates that no new vessels be added to its existing shrimp fleet. Rather than upset this situation the Cameroon Government has restricted the size of the fleet.

One U.S. firm, based in New Jersey, has been forced to stop fishing because of this ban. Under terms of an agreement between the United States firm and the Cameroon Government an experimental shrimp and finfish fishery was started in May 1972. The agreement expired in October 1973. At the end of the trial period, the United States firm wished to put 10 shrimp trawlers in the Cameroon, but it was too late; the Government was forced to deny the request.

The Cameroon's bottomfish fisheries have also been affected. Gabon also extended its territorial waters--to 100 miles (160 km)--and enforced this edict by seizing Cameroonian trawlers. The bottomfish fleets are also hindered by the extension of territorial waters by Equatorial Guinea (Rio Muni and

Fernando Po) to 12 miles (19 km). The result is that the Cameroon fisheries are being faced with increasingly limited fishing grounds. The consequences have been to force Cameroonian trawlers to concentrate on high seas fishing--notably off Angola and Southwest Africa--while smaller craft concentrate on heavily fished local resources. The outlook for continued expansion of the nation's industrial fisheries is, therefore, somewhat uncertain at the moment.

FISHING COMPANIES[2/]

Société a la Pêche Cotières a la Baleine (SOPECOBA):

SOPECOBA was founded in 1951 and is the Cameroon's oldest fishery firm. The company was originally formed by a French and Norwegian group, and is now partially owned by Cameroonian interests. SOPECOBA was initially involved in the operations of the Crevette du Cameroun, but sold its interest in that firm to the Cameroon Government. It has an interest in La Société Africaine de Pêche Industrielle (SAPI) and may have relations with other firms. SOPECOBA operates about 12 trawlers.

Société Industrielle des pêches au Cameroun (SIPEC):

SIPEC is a joint venture company established in September 1967 with Cameroonian, Dutch (Compagnie Commerciale Hollando-Afrique - 32.5 percent), and Spanish (Pescanova S.A. - 32.5 percent) interests. The company began as a fishing and distribution firm specializing in fresh (iced) and frozen fish. SIPEC has a plant with two blast freezers, each with a 6 t/day capacity, and a 1,500-t cold storage facility which can store products at -25°C. As part of its distribution system the firm operates three refrigerated freight cars, six 10t trucks, and six smaller refrigerated vans. The company uses these vehicles to supply its network of 15 depots in 12 different cities or towns.[3/] Each facility has a 20-t cold storage capacity, and further distribution to more remote villages is undertaken from these depots.

2/ Information on the Cameroon's fishing companies was also obtained, in part, from an article entitled: "Au Cameroun, la consommation de produits de la pêche a triple en six ans grace a la modernisation du reseau des distribution," which was published by La Pêche Maritime, August 20, 1971, pp. 657-660.

3/ SIPEC's distribution centers are located in Douala, Yaounde, Mbalmayo, Sangmelima, Ebolowa, Bertoua, Bafia, Koumba, Bamenda, Bafoussam, Buea, and Victoria.

SIPEC owns Villalba,[4/] a 1,600-GRT stern trawler and Pambre, a 550-GRT stern trawler. Both vessels fish off Angola and southwest Africa. Villalba averages about 700 t of fish per 60-day trip; Pambre averages about 200 t of fish during its 30-day trips. The company also owns a 278-GRT Dutch-built shrimp trawler, Maria Theresia, which fishes with Gulf of Mexico shrimp trawls. This vessel averages about 180 t of shrimp (heads-on) per year.

In mid-1970 the Japanese fisheries firm Hoko Suisan joined the SIPEC association. In September 1970, the Japanese partner sent the 300-GRT reconditioned vessel Soho Maru No. 85 to begin shrimping for the company off the Cameroons and Nigeria. Fishing was so good that another 300-GRT vessel, the Seishin Maru, was sent to join her sister ship in March 1971.

In 1973, the SIPEC company decided to convert these two Japanese vessels into crab fishing boats. The decision was due to the discovery of large, red crabs (Geryon sp) species off Angola where other Japanese vessels were fishing. In January 1974 the two SIPEC vessels began fishing for these crabs using crab traps similar to those used in the Bering Sea tanner crab fisheries.

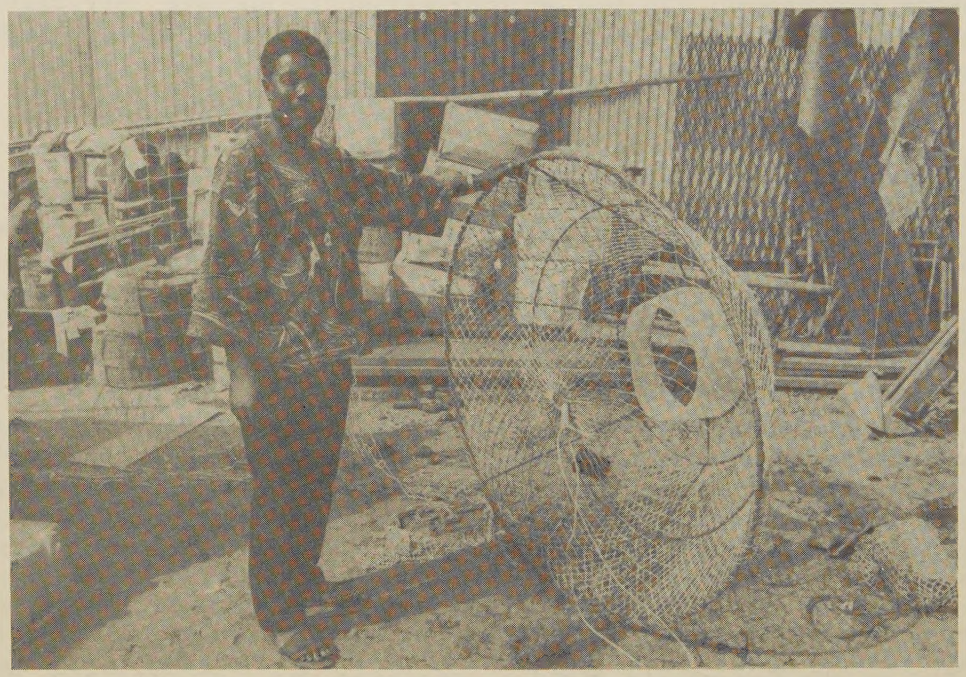


Figure 3.--A Japanese-built crab pot used in crab fishing off Angola by SIPEC vessels.

4/ Villalba was Spain's first refrigerated stern trawler. It was built in 1963 by Astilleros Construcciones S.A.

Each vessel carries 1,500 of these traps, which are set in waters 400 to 600 m. deep. A vessel sets and hauls an average of about 500 of these pots each day. The company has reported averaging about 15 crabs per trap per day; good hauls reach 24 crabs per pot. The catch is processed on board and is later exported.

Crevettes du Cameroun (CRECAM):

CRECAM was established in late 1967 as a joint venture shrimp fishing, processing, and exporting firm. The original partners in this venture included the Gorton Corporation of Gloucester, the Societe a la Peche Cotieres a la Baleine (SOPECOBA), and the Cameroon Government agency Societe Nationale d'Investissement.

CRECAM began shrimping in August 1969 with two 72-ft (21 m), double-rigged, steel-hulled shrimp trawlers called Alpha I and II. These two vessels were built in France and had 365-hp Caterpillar engines. In September 1969, four more vessels arrived; in November two more vessels arrived. These additional vessels were also named Alpha (III to VIII).

Figure 4.--The French-built shrimp trawler Alpha VI. The vessel belongs to the Crevettes du Cameroun and has just returned from a 9-day trip with 3,400 lbs (heads-off) of pink shrimp.

In 1970, the company added two 74-ft (22 m), fiberglass shrimp trawlers, the Gamma I. and II. to its fleet. In December 1973, CRECA added three 76-ft (23 m) vessels to its growing shrimp fleet. These three vessels, called Delta I., II., and III., were built by the Rockport Yacht and Supply Co., Inc. In January 1974, however, one of these vessels was lost and the company replaced the vessel with a 75-ft (22 m) trawler called Cape Dave.

The company has planned to add seven more trawlers to its shrimp fleet during 1974, but the Cameroon Government would not permit this increase because of its agreement with Nigeria to limit its shrimp fleet.

Crevette du Cameroun's processing plant is a modern, well-equipped plant that employs 280 workers, of which 200 are women. The plant's facilities include a 4 t/day Sort-Rite processing line, a 400-m^3 freezing unit which freezes the shrimp at -22°C and a cold storage area capable of storing 150 t of product. The firm also has a 20 t/day ice making machine and has supply stores for its vessels.

Iced and headed shrimp are unloaded from the company's vessels at the Douala dock. The shrimp is then loaded onto trucks for delivery to the plant which is about a mile away. At the plant the shrimp are washed and graded by size. Shrimp destined for export to the United States (20 to 25 percent) are peeled and deveined, packed in 5-lb cartons, and then frozen. Marketing in the United States is done by Transworld Fisheries, a Gorton subsidiary. Shrimp destined for export to Japan (75 to 80 percent) are left unpeeled.

La Camerounaise de Pêche:

This company became active in 1969 with a 12-m steel-hulled trawler that was built in the Cameroons. The vessel was called Pionair I. Later, the company built a 17-m trawler, Apollo XI. The company had a small office and cold store in Douala and sold most of its catch to SIPEC for resale.

Societe Cooperative de Pêche de Kribi (SOCOPEK):

SOCOPEK is a fairly new fisheries cooperative. It is a few miles to the north of Rio Muni and is the only fishing port outside of Douala to cater to the industrial fisheries. In July 1971 the cooperative obtained a 16-m wooden vessel which it presumably uses to trawl for finfish.

La Societe Africaine de Pêche Industrielle (SAPI):

SAPI reportedly operates a trawler for catching sardines. It is the only company reported fishing for sardines on a large scale. The firm is believed affiliated with SOPECOBA. No additional information is available on this firm.

Societe Camerounaise de Produits de Mer (SCPM):

This firm--also identified as Societe Camerounaise de Stockage (SCS)-- was the Cameroon's first fresh (iced) and frozen seafood distributor; however; since SIPEC began operating in 1968, this company has declined in importance. At present SCPM has a 170-t cold store in Douala and another facility in

Yaounde. Smaller cold storage units are in 12 other towns. In the early and mid-1960s the firm purchased fish from Soviet fishing vessels visiting Douala. The company does not operate any vessels of its own.

Les Etablissement Cotonnec & Cie:

This firm reportedly operates eight trawlers. No other information is available on its operations.

Other:

Les Pecheries Camerounaises (PECAM) and Pecheries Corneillet are reported as fishing with 11 trawlers in 1964, but no current information is available on their present operations. One company in the Cameroons (unidentified), which is partially owned by a Nigerian fishing company, imports frozen fish that are distributed to 10 cold storage depots in Nigeria.

Figure 5.--A load of flaked ice being delivered to a trawler in Douala. Until recently, iced fish was the only form of fish found in Cameroon fisheries.

Before 1968 the marketing of iced, fresh fish was handled exclusively by SCPM, which was licensed to import fish for this purpose. This company also managed the distribution of the catch of the various fishing companies in operation. At that time about 60 percent of the catch was being consumed in Douala and about 35 percent in Yaounde--leaving a mere 5 percent for the rest of the country. In 1968, however, SIPEC entered the market and began to expand the nation's distribution system. By 1971 about 26 different towns and cities had facilities to hold frozen fish products. Figure 6 provides an illustration of the cold store distribution system in Cameroon.

Iced fish is still the most important fishery commodity sold locally. This iced fish is still unloaded at Douala where some of the catch is sold to local retailers for immediate sale on the Douala market. However, more and more fish is being frozen and placed into cold storage for distribution throughout the country.

The development of this distribution system will have an impact on the nutritional standards of the country. As indicated earlier most of Cameroon's fish is consumed locally as fresh fish or is dried or smoked for resale. The quality and nutritional value of the dried and smoked fish products, however, is not considered particularly high. Thus, many Cameroonians are now able to obtain more nutritious seafood products as a result of the diversification of the cold storage chain throughout the country.

DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Under the Cameroon's Third 5-Year Plan (1971-76) the fishing port at Douala is to be expanded. At present only 128 m of pier frontage are available for the fishing fleet.

The Cameroonians also hope to expand the high-seas fleet by purchasing two tuna vessels and one sardine seiner. This purchase will be followed by the construction of a cannery able to process 2,400 t of tuna and 2,200 t of sardines each year. These actions will help reduce fishery imports which increased from 2,365 t in 1971 to 4,737 t in 1973.

Some plans are also being prepared for improving fish smoking techniques and for providing educational services for inland and coastal fishermen throughout the country.

Figure 6.--Map of Cameroons showing the location of the country's cold stores.